

The Christian News-Letter

No. 183

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

June 2nd, 1943

DEAR MEMBER,

The performance and publication of the cycle of plays on the life of Christ by Miss Dorothy L. Sayers, and presented in the course of the past two years by the B.B.C.¹, are in the religious sphere one of the outstanding events of these war years.

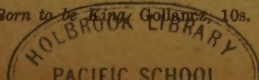
THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

The most moving, transforming story in the world, a story which is the turning-point of history, has been told again so that millions have listened to it, and to many it has come home with new meaning. Miss Sayers is a writer who knows her trade, and she tells us in her introduction to the plays that this very great story is in these days seldom taken seriously. It is often treated with gingerly solemnity, and that is what honest writers call frivolous treatment. "Not Herod," she says, "not Caiaphas, not Pilate, not Judas ever contrived to fasten upon Jesus Christ the reproach of insipidity; that final indignity was left for pious hands to inflict. To make of His story something that could neither startle, nor shock, nor terrify, nor excite, nor inspire a living soul is to crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. . . . Let me tell you, good Christian people, an honest writer would be ashamed to treat a nursery tale as you have treated the greatest drama in history."

The story has been told. The condition of the soil into which the seed has fallen we do not know. Christ was put to death in a society resembling in many respects our own, by people extraordinarily like ourselves. The pre-occupation in petty and sordid affairs, indifference, complacency and astonishing blindness to what was happening, which are vividly portrayed in the plays, are characteristic also of our own age. We may be as incapable as the people of that time (apart from a small handful from whose eyes the scales fell) of recognizing the greatest wonder of all time.

But what can be done by one who has felt the power of the story to make it live again for others Miss Sayers has done. The means employed are the translation and paraphrase of the original homely and vigorous Greek into its counterpart in modern English speech, and the filling out of the narrative by the introduction of vividly imagined and realistically portrayed characters who in this or some similar form must have had their part in the historical drama. The complaint of a critic that "the atmosphere created seems so different from that of the original story, where it is all so impressively and wonderfully told"

¹ *The Man Born to be King*, Gollancz, 10s. 6d.



is a testimony to what has been achieved. It is just "the atmospheric haze of antiquity" with its "misty, pleasant, picturesque obscurity" that prevents us from being shocked and moved to wondering awe.

The close connection between the situation depicted in the plays and the problems of our own time has dictated the emphasis and the approach. The minds of men in those days were exercised, as ours are, "by problems about the derivation of authority, the conflict between centralized or decentralized government, the sanctions behind power-politics, and the place of national independence within a world-civilization. No force of any kind was needed to bring the story into a form that was sharply topical."

What Mr. Alan Dent said in the *Listener* about the plays sums up what many felt: "The modern treatment seems to me to be as sensible as it is reverent. Its immediate effect on the most agnostic mind is to oblige it to accept these major historical facts as having happened, still more—as actually happening. I was moved and thrilled and astonished."

ARCHETYPES

Following out a suggestion made in an earlier News-Letter, Professor Hodges opens up in this week's Supplement a question that deserves much greater attention than it commonly receives. It is by the forms of the imagination, much more than by cold rational propositions or abstract moral principles, that our responses to life are influenced at the deepest levels. To a far greater extent than we realize our actions are determined by the typical figures which symbolize what we believe to be most meaningful and valuable in life. No one need allow himself to be put off by the unfamiliar terms "archetype" or "paradigm." Professor Hodges explains very clearly and by numerous examples what he means by them.

A single Supplement cannot do more than raise the question and show its importance. It will have done much if it lodges the question in our minds and induces us to pursue it farther. The answers to the questions which he formulates at the close can be found only by the work of numerous individuals who have been seized by the idea and follow it out in many directions and in many different contexts.

An understanding of the place of archetypes in human experience sheds light, for example, on the theory and practice of meditation. Another field in which archetypes are of fundamental importance is education; they are the vital means by which the purposes of society can be communicated to the youth of the nation.

There is, of course, a class of people, including some teachers, who will look on the whole idea as childish and belonging to a stage we have outgrown. "Why do we need archetypes?" they will ask; "Can't we govern ourselves by reason?" This opposition arises partly from the fact that archetypes are emotionally charged, and some people are afraid of emotion; still more, perhaps, from the fact that archetypes imply a definite commitment, whereas many want to remain free and open to every possibility. They fail to realize that this is impossible. The freedom from archetypes in which they want to take refuge is itself an archetype—a picture of the man who is free from the influence of all images.

I sent the Supplement in draft to Miss Dorothy L. Sayers in writing to her about her plays, and received from her the following illuminating comment :—

"I think it is all quite true. But if the artist sets out deliberately and consciously to produce 'archetypes' and 'paradigms' (Golly! what a word!) he is likely to defeat his own ends, because he will be setting up, as an end external to his art, something which ought to be central to it. The business of the artist is, I think, not to instruct his audience, but to *be* his audience and to express them. That is, he is the 'common man' of every age, only more articulate. Consequently he is bound to be, to some extent, the mouthpiece of his age and to see universal stories through the atmosphere of his time. But, on the whole, the less he thinks about that the better. I mean, his job is to keep his eye on the story, not on the effect he means his handling of it to produce on the man in the street. Otherwise, his gaze will be fixed, not on the story, but on himself—which is the essence of sinfulness in the sphere of art no less than in the sphere of morals. Of course, when he has done the job, he will probably be able to turn critic, and think it over, and rationalize his own procedure, and produce a whole lot of excellent explanations why he did this or that, and how it is relevant to 'the problems of the present time' and all that. But he had better not set about doing that before he begins or while he is working, or he will run the risk of producing something which is not art at all, but only propaganda.

"The one question he has to ask before he starts is: 'What *is* this story, and how best can I tell it?' Doubtless he will decide what the story 'is' according to his own, or his age's, paradigmatic (Golly! what a word!) experience. But it's not a question of his deliberately 'putting the story in a fresh light,' it's that the story *shows itself to him* in a 'fresh' light, and that the truth comes *in that way* to him, so that he cannot himself present it except by that light and in that way. Because that is what the story means to him: that is what the story *is*."

SCIENCE AND THE CITIZEN

The zeal which characterized the recent conference of the British Association in London on the subject of "Science and the Citizen" is a fresh reminder of the growing self-consciousness of scientists, which is one of the most important facts of our time.

The chief concern of the conference was the popularization of science. A large amount of time was devoted to consideration of the means of informing a relatively ignorant public (including many of the present leaders of public life) of the achievements and possibilities of science. There was much discussion of the techniques of popularization through radio, the press, the cinema, modern display methods, discussion groups, lectures and dialogues. Professor Lauerys set before the conference the aim of a "Temple of Vision" in every large town, which would be a "civic microcosm to form an integral part of the education of the town." The phrase a "*temple of vision*" is at once a striking indication of the enthusiastic belief of the conference in the contribution which science can make to the understanding and control

of our environment, and a reminder of the danger of pressing, under the influence of this enthusiasm, into regions beyond the confines of science.

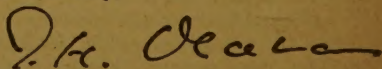
Three main ideas seemed to dominate the discussions. The first was that of the responsibility of scientists for seeing that their work and its results are used for the benefit of the community. As one of the speakers said, "It is not sufficient for science to give birth to discoveries and leave them like foundlings on the doorstep of society." That is very true. While the responsibility belongs to scientists as citizens rather than as scientific workers, it is one which the ordinary citizen is in many cases precluded by his lack of knowledge from exercising, so that a special *civic* responsibility rests on the scientist just because he is a scientist.

Secondly, there was manifest the conviction that scientists have something to contribute of essential value to the life of society. That also is undoubtedly true, and there can be nothing but sympathy with the effort to get it more widely understood.

Thirdly, there was a strong emphasis on the value of science as a mental discipline and training in the habits of exact thought. The brilliant successes of science, as Professor Hodges pointed out in his previous Supplement to the Christian News-Letter, "are the result of precise observation, precise statement, patience and ingenuity of experiment, and caution in drawing the conclusion." In these respects no other discipline can equal it.

As we have repeatedly urged in the News-Letter, there is something here to which Christians ought to be intensely alive. There is a stirring of life, a zeal and missionary fervour among those who desire to serve their fellows through science which is not often found in an equal degree in Christian gatherings. In the movement to promote and make known the contribution to human good which science, and science alone, can provide, Christians ought to take an enthusiastic share. Only by active participation in the movement can they fulfil their further task of helping to leaven it with the knowledge that, immense as are the possibilities of science, the scientific approach is only *one* approach to reality, and that beyond all knowledge lie the love of persons and obedience to a divine law.

Yours sincerely,



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THE PROBLEM OF ARCHETYPES

DEAR OLDHAM,

Your recent Supplement on Mannheim (C.N-L. No. 174) raises, among others, the question of what Mannheim calls "paradigmatic" and you call "commanding" experiences. You bring them in when talking about the causes which determine how people act. To a large extent, of course, what a man does will depend on how he is circumstanced. All action is an adjustment between ourselves and our environment. But, as you point out, this is not the whole truth. Situations often occur in which there are several things that we could do, all equally effective (so far as we can see) in adjusting the relation between ourselves and our surroundings. In such cases we have to choose, and we must ask which of the courses open to us is, in itself and in its probable consequences, the most worth while. Of two actions, equally possible and effective, we shall usually find one to be more deeply and permanently satisfying than the other. This is the one that we shall choose, and we shall choose it not by reference to the situation immediately confronting us, but to the deeper question of the kind of life we wish to live and the kind of person we wish to be.

PARADIGMATIC EXPERIENCES

There are many experiences and activities which we find worth while and satisfying in themselves, and in need of no justification beyond the fact that they are what they are. It is these which form our scale of values. Among them a few stand out as constituting the high peaks of our existence, the moments when we feel we were most ourselves and most in harmony with the world about us. These are Mannheim's "paradigmatic experiences," and no discussion of human conduct will get to the heart of its subject unless it takes them into account.

We are not all alike, and our paradigmatic experiences are not all the same. Many people, moreover, are not clearly conscious of what their own paradigmatic experiences are. They act without deep reflection, they go with their group. The boys' gang, for example, is a society which realizes a blend of two important experiences—power and fellowship—which are paradigmatic for boys of the gang-forming age. But the boys in a particular gang have not thought the matter out in this way. They have not begun by recognizing power and fellowship as paradigmatic for them, and then devised a form of association to give effect to these values. They have been drawn together instinctively, and it is the psychologist or sociologist who comes in later and analyses their motives.

It is partly the same with larger groups, social movements and institutions, nations and civilizations. The majority of the members of such groups take themselves and their own ways of thinking and acting for granted, and it is only a small creative minority who can

stand far enough away to understand the moving forces of the groups to which they belong. What is ignored at the time and place, however, is clear enough to the historian or sociologist at a distance. It is easy for a modern with the requisite historical knowledge to catch the flavour of Greek antiquity and to distinguish the paradigmatic values of clarity, stability, restraint, etc., on which it is based.

The ignorance of a civilization as to its own paradigmatic experiences cannot be complete. While the majority may be carried along in the stream of habit and convention, and reflect little or not at all, there must always be some who understand the paradigms and give expression to them in phrases and slogans which rally the enthusiasm of the masses. It is from such imaginative phrases that political movements get their drive. It is not in the details of the successive French constitutions in the years after 1789 that the real driving force of the Revolution is seen, but in the paradigmatic experiences focussed in its slogan "Liberty, equality, fraternity." "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need" expresses another paradigmatic experience: fellowship expressed in social justice.

Religions as well as political movements are based on paradigmatic experiences, and these are to be found especially in personal religion and in the religious life of small intimate groups. The reason why the Psalms have made such an appeal to Christians in all times and countries is mainly that they express in a memorable way so many of the central experiences of Christianity—adoration, confrontation, obedience, penitence, forgiveness, love, trust, joy, etc.

TYPICAL FIGURES

Paradigmatic experiences are often expressed and crystallized in typical figures which portray what we ourselves should like to have or to be, and which therefore become for us the objects of envy, or admiration, or imitation. Sometimes these are generalized types, like the gentleman in Victorian England. Sometimes a real historical figure is seized upon and made symbolic of a type of life and character, as Drake, Napoleon, Gandhi, St. Francis, Socrates. Each of these is more than a man who lived at a particular place and date. For many people he has become an ideal which transcends time and country.

Such ideal or idealized figures seem to fall into two classes, some being in a measure the result of rational reflection, and others not so. The Victorian gentleman was constructed (with pre-existing materials of course) by Arnold of Rugby and a few others who saw that it was necessary to civilize the rich middle class which the Reform Bill brought into power, and who did so by means of the gentleman as their ideal and the Public Schools as the mechanism for putting it across. Napoleon also owes much of his influence to an assiduously propagated legend. Such artificially constructed types can work well for a time, but changing circumstances will ultimately leave them behind. While power and privilege were taken for granted as facts of life, it was excellent to insist on the true gentleman as the man who combined these with responsibility and service; but to-day the very idea of power and privilege is called in question, and the gentleman is out of date.

ARCHETYPES

But there is another class of typical figures which seem to belong to all times and places, because they express not a deliberate rational adjustment to a particular situation, but deep-seated emotional attitudes to human life and destiny. Many of these figures appear in folklore and mythology, in popular arts like the novel and the cinema, and some psychologists have found that they tend to emerge in dreams and fantasies which spring from deep unconscious roots in the minds. Jung has called them *archetypes*, and we may well borrow the word from him. The archetypes are those typical figures which express the deepest and most universal, but often unconscious, hopes and fears of mankind, the paradigmatic experiences not of modern men or European man, but of man as such.

We can find these figures quite easily by studying our fairy tales and noting the stock characters which recur in them: the wizard, who appears ugly and eccentric, but enjoys secret and irresistible power; the king and queen, who enjoy arbitrary power, wealth, luxury and splendour, and who sometimes, but not always, appear also as just and kind in their use of power; the little man who overcomes the giant; the ugly or despised person who is really a prince; the young hero who kills dragons and wins the hand of a princess; the sleeping beauty who awakes to life and love at the prince's touch. In these and similar figures are summed up the crude ambitions of mankind: the love of power and pleasure, of wealth and reputation, the fear of weakness, old age, death and the incalculable. The same figures and stories reappear, slightly changed, in the popular novel and film, and do much to mould the minds and characters of us all. We even dramatize current events in these terms, e.g. a small nation standing up to a big aggressor is sure to find some journalist to liken it to David defying Goliath, and important political results can follow from skilful exploitation of the archetypes. Hitler has dramatized himself as the little man who achieves power, and millions of little men in Germany feel themselves exalted with him.

The great religions also have their archetypes—i.e. gods, prophets, saints and sages, and archetypal stories in which these figure. These express the experiences and attitudes to life which are paradigmatic for the religion to which they belong, and in all the great religions these are on a higher moral and spiritual level than those of folklore and popular art. Wisdom and righteousness, self-sacrifice and devotion to God, find a principal place among them. In Christian tradition we have a set of figures leading up through the Old Testament to Christ: Abraham the Friend of God, Moses with whom God speaks face to face, David the man after God's own heart, the Servant of the Lord who mysteriously suffers for the redemption of his persecutors, and many more. All these are focussed in Christ, like a sheaf of light-rays, and from Him they divide again as the light is refracted through the Apostles and saints down to this day.

Every religion, political movement, society or civilization may be known by its archetypes. No society can live on technical achievement alone. It must also believe in itself, i.e. it must have a conception of

life and destiny which will express itself in paradigms and archetypes ; and when these begin to lose their potency, however wealth and power may increase, that civilization is coming to an end. If new archetypes take the place of the old, it will change into another civilization, as mediaeval Christendom changed into the Renaissance world. If no new archetypes appear, it will die away into a dark age. But while this shows how important it is to have living archetypes and paradigms to keep the great machine of technology working to some purpose, there is a converse truth which we must also keep in mind. The best of archetypes can be killed for the mass of men by social conditions. However much a society may hear justice and mercy preached and taught, if the reality of its life is cut-throat competition, breeding insecurity, fear and selfishness, the people will be disillusioned about all values except those of the prize-ring. They will be a willing prey for the first leader who comes along with his shirted army and plays on their meaner ambitions. While no society can be built or maintained to-day without an education that puts across moral and spiritual values, it is equally true that no education can put them across if the social surroundings give them the lie direct.

This raises deep and difficult questions about the future of our own society. Into these questions I cannot go now, but I should like to close with an indication of where they lie. (1) Archetypes and paradigms express the fundamental tendencies of human nature, which are always and everywhere the same, but which show themselves very variously in response to differing conditions. The archetypes reflect this variety. With certain fundamental features in common, they yet have a history, and those of one age do not carry over unmodified into the next. What form will they take in the future society towards which we are moving ? What is the best form that they can take, having regard to the social framework which they will inhabit and have to endow with life ? (2) We talk of Christianity as a formative influence which might with advantage be felt in this future society ; but what will, or can, or should, the Christianity of the future be ? For Christianity also has a history, and while nothing is Christian which is not in line with the great tradition from Abraham to Christ, and from Him along the centuries in the life of His Church, we must expect that history to prolong itself and to bring changes as great as those which already separate the Christianity of to-day from that of past ages. These changes cannot be unrelated to the changes in secular ideas and institutions. Christianity cannot be only a formative force, it must also receive influences from without. In what direction should the meditations of a discerning Christendom begin to turn to-day, and what paradigms and archetypes in our Christian treasury contain the promise of a fruitful development ?

Yours sincerely,

H. A. HODGES

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